

Obit 'Peddler' Moves at a Fast Clip

By Nona Cleland
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A few hours after the news was released of the death in Vietnam of the son of Merriman Smith, veteran United Press International White House correspondent, the phone rang at Smith's Alexandria home.

Smith's maid answered the call and after hanging up, informed Smith that a man who identified himself as a member of the press would like Smith to call him at once.

Smith immediately returned the call and found himself talking to Prescott Dennett.

Dennett told Smith the death of his son was tragic. But it was also historic, Dennett said, and surely, Smith would want to preserve the public notices and acclaim for later generations.

Dennett then proceeded to

quote prices to Smith of \$215 per thousand for clippings about his son's death from domestic news sources, \$325 per thousand from foreign sources and \$177.50 for a dozen typed transcripts of anything said over radio and television.

Runs Five Agencies

Dennett, who says he manages five clipping services in Washington, confirmed the incident yesterday.

"As soon as Mrs. Dennett and I heard of the death of Smith's son, I grabbed the phone," said Dennett.

"We felt like we knew him. I used to watch him on Jack Parr. The wife and I would pull up our chairs and sit back and listen and his stories about the White House."

"Excuse me a moment," said Dennett to a reporter to whom he was talking on the phone, "I have to make a phone call at 4 o'clock. I do have to make a nickel, you know."

Asked when he returned to the phone how he chose whom to call, Dennett said that it depended on the person's prominence in the news.

'Prospect's a Prospect'

Just yesterday, he said, he had put some clippings in the mail to the widow of Albert Thomas, a member of the House of Representatives who died recently. He had offered his service to Mrs. Thomas as soon as he heard of her husband's death.

"But a prospect's a prospect with us," said Dennett. "It could be a newspaperman, a plumber or the fellow down the block."

Julius Frandsen, chief of the Washington bureau of United Press International, told a reporter that he had been approached on the phone by Dennett both on the death of Merriman Smith's son and on the death of Hugh Baillie, former head of the old United Press.

Dennett, who is 58, says he has been in the clipping service business at least 25 years. He said he approaches not only the family of a famous person who dies, but anyone who might have had a connection with him.

Sometimes people call a

few weeks later and all of the papers have been thrown out and then it's too late," he said.

Dennett, who is listed in the phone book as "correspondent," lives and works at 1868 Columbia Road. His wife, Ruth, is chief reader for his Congressional Record Clipping Service.

The five clipping businesses he manages are listed as Congressional Record Clipping, Columbia News-vertising, American Trade Press Clipping Bureau, International Press Clipping Bureau Inc. (A Half Century of Reputable Service), and Radio TV Manuscripts.

Most of the actual clipping is done in New York. "I'm just a peddler," said Dennett.

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